

WORKING PAPERS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Working papers are rough notes, calculations, or drafts assembled or created and used to prepare or analyze other documents. Recordkeeping requirements, filing plans, and records schedules are the best source of information about whether working papers need to be retained for the type of activity being documented. Working papers, including drafts, background information, etc., may or may not be needed as part of the documentation for activities.

Working Papers are retained when...

In some cases, working papers such as drafts, notes, comments, and background materials may be needed to adequately document agency activities. Drafts and working papers or files that propose and evaluate options or alternatives and their implications in the development of high-level policies and decisions or that document findings or support recommendations should be preserved.

Principal Categories of Disposable Working Papers...

In other cases, working papers may not be needed once a document is completed. There are two principal types of disposable working papers:

- Working papers that receive no official action themselves, are not reviewed or approved by others, and are simply used to prepare documents for official action such as review, signature, publication, etc.

Examples: Budget calculations using different parameters, preliminary outlines for a report, lists of suggested points to be included in a memo.

- Working papers that relate to preliminary, interim or ancillary activities that are **not needed** as part of the official record of the activity.

Examples: Drafts of routine memoranda and correspondence and proposed changes, informal comments received on a draft publication, documents used to brief staff and achieve concurrence on a proposed action.

Specific Types of Working Papers Include...

Drafts

Drafts, and the comments on them, require special attention. In some cases, drafts and comments on them must be included in the official files as part of the documentation activity. Although records of Federal agencies usually contain high-level policies and decisions, policy formulation and execution may be poorly documented. Support documents such as drafts and working files for reports, special studies, memoranda, and correspondence that support major program policy development may not be incorporated into office files. These support documents may be needed to fully understand the alternatives and options considered for high-level program initiatives, and the basis for deciding on a course of action. Some drafts contain unique information in substantive annotations or comments added during circulation for comment or approval. Agencies should maintain such drafts, with the file copy of the final document, if any, when the drafts relate to formulation and execution of high-level policies, decisions, actions, or responsibilities.

However, there are many instances when drafts can be safely destroyed. Drafts and working papers or files that relate to routine program administrative operations or that contain only corrections or editorial or stylistic changes may be disposed of as non-record materials. Examples include drafts not circulated for comment and drafts of most general publications, correspondence, internal memoranda, and other documents not related to critical functions. In such cases, drafts and editorial comments can be destroyed once changes have been included in a revised version.

Notes

Unless otherwise specified, notes may be deleted/destroyed once they are incorporated into a final product. Examples include notes used to prepare minutes of meetings, records of telephone conversations, decision memoranda, or other documents when the gist of the discussion, conversation, direction, or other activity is embodied in a document that states the official Agency decision, position, or outcome.

Comments

Unless otherwise specified, comments received on drafts, proposals, suggestions, and similar things can be deleted/destroyed once they have been incorporated or summarized for the official record. Examples include editorial comments on drafts of internal memoranda, routine correspondence, and reports.

However, comments received via a formal Agency comment process, comments received from the public/regulated community, or comments received during a formal review by outside experts should be carefully documented for the record, either by keeping the original comments themselves, or, if volume is extensive, keeping a summary of the comments and how they were used. Substantive comments added during circulation for comment or approval and other important documents should be retained.

Development materials

Special attention should be given to notebooks, calculations, and other background materials that may contain information needed to supplement formal records. *However*, documents such as preliminary calculations, approaches to issues, outlines, and other documents that the individual uses to prepare documents for official action can be deleted/destroyed once they are incorporated into a final product.

Examples include annotated copies of documents, preliminary calculations, results of preliminary investigations, lists of points to be considered or included, ideas or suggestions received from coworkers, and other documentation used in the development of documents for official action.

Points to Remember about Working Papers

- Recordkeeping requirements, filing plans, and records schedules are the best source of information about whether working papers need to be retained for the type of being documented.
- When in doubt, contact your Records Manager for further guidance.